Higher Education and the Labor Market

Reskilling and Upskilling in the Post-COVID-19 Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a deep recession with a sharp rise in unemployment. A significant percentage of jobs lost may never return. Washington residents need clear and efficient pathways to reskill to jobs in new industries that offer more opportunity to upskill for career advancement. Most upskilling opportunities require post-secondary certificates and degrees, so reskilling programs need to both help people get a new job and provide a head start to moving up in their new industry.

- African American and Latinx workers, young adults, and those without postsecondary education are being hit hardest by the Covid-19 recession.
- We know that during the Great Recession, workers without postsecondary education were the slowest to recover.
- Reskilling an upskilling are critical steps for many unemployed or displaced workers to successfully reenter the labor market.
- The Washington College Grant (WCG) can support workers’ upskilling and reskilling efforts, especially for those who have not previously accessed postsecondary education.
- There are credential pathways in a broad range of fields to assist students and working adults qualify for entry-level and next-step occupations.

Strategies to Support Reskilling and Upskilling for a Sustained and Equitable Recovery

Short-Term:
- Increase awareness of short-term, non-degree programs that provide qualifications for living-wage jobs
- Ensure broad access to online courses that offer flexibility and alternatives to in-person classes
- Provide support services to students who face barriers to attending and persisting in postsecondary education and training programs
- Expand the use of Academic Credit for Prior Learning for certificate and degree programs

Long-Term:
- Continue to develop the range of certificate programs that are stackable toward degrees
- Extend the availability of credential pathways in rural areas of the state that have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 recession
**Illustrations of Upskilling and Reskilling in Washington**

**Upskilling Scenario:** After high school, Bailey completed a 5-quarter Auto Repair Technician certificate program and was hired for an entry-level job in the field. After two years, he decided to upskill to broaden his expertise and qualify for more advanced positions in auto technology. Applying credits from the earlier certificate program, he completed an additional 21 credits to earn an associate degree in auto repair. With this more advanced credential, he obtained a higher-paying job doing more complex work in auto mechanics. After a few years of working in that position, he decided to upskill again, still within the general field of transportation technology. This time, leveraging the mechanical knowledge and skills he had acquired through his previous training and work experience, he entered and completed a 5-Quarter certificate program in diesel and heavy equipment technology. With this credential, he qualified to move up to significantly higher-paying positions.

**Transportation Technology:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry-Level Occupation</th>
<th>Next-Step</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automotive Service Tech/Mechanic</td>
<td>Diesel Mechanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavy Equipment Mechanic</td>
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Lake Washington Institute of Technology, for example, offers the following certificate and associate degree programs:

- **Auto Repair Technician - Certificate of Proficiency (79 credits)** Preparation for an entry level job as an auto service technician
- **Auto Repair Technician – Associate Degree (100 credits – 21 credits beyond the Certificate)** Preparation for more advanced positions in auto mechanics and technology
- **Diesel and Heavy Equipment Technician – Certificate of Proficiency (73 credits)** Preparation for a more high-paying job in diesel or heavy equipment mechanics

**Reskilling Scenario:** When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Dana had been working in the hospitality industry. This industry was among the hardest hit, with projections showing that a full recovery would likely take several years. She was laid off and decided to reskill for a new occupation in information technology, a field with better job prospects. She begins with a short-term, 24-credit certificate program in computer support and is hired relatively quickly for a job as a helpdesk technician. She decides to continue her reskilling training with additional certificate programs, eventually completing an associate degree, using credits acquired in each prior program to shorten the time necessary to complete the next one. She leverages her training and work experience to advance in her new career in information technology.

**Information Technology:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry-Level Occupation</th>
<th>Next-Step</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer Support Specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network Support Specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network Administrator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems Administrator – Associate in Applied Science – Transfer</td>
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Big Bend Community College, for example, offers the following certificate and associate degree programs in Information Tech.:  

- **Computer Support Specialist - Certificate of Accomplishment (24 Credits)** Preparation for an entry level job as a computer support specialist or helpdesk technician
- **Network Support Specialist – Certificate of Accomplishment (29 credits)** Preparation for positions in IT network support
- **Systems Administration – Certificate of Accomplishment (47-51 credits)** Preparation for an entry level job as a computer systems technician
- **Systems Administration – Associate in Applied Science – Transfer** Preparation for a career in network systems and administration and/or transfer to a bachelor’s program

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4. See https://www.stradaeducation.org/publicviewpoint
6. See https://www.bigbend.edu/academics/programs/computer-science/certificates/